

February 24, 2016

Dear Members of the Instructional Quality Commission and the California Board of Education,

We write to submit extended corrections to the current draft curriculum framework; these edits supersede those we submitted on November 18, 2015 (the rest of the report stands). We are aware of objections to our report by groups espousing Hindu nationalist views.ⁱ Since we have tried to make our recommendations, and the rationale for them clear, we leave it to the IQC to decide whether the edits we suggest are appropriate to grade level and of academic integrity. We are also available to answer any questions the IQC or the History-Social Science evaluators might have on the edits we have submitted.

We recommend that “the religion of Ancient India” be used throughout the framework for the 6th grade curriculum, rather than “Hinduism or “the religion of India.” Gods,” “goddesses,” and “deities” should be in lower case throughout, and Brahmin, the name of a group of people, should be capitalized throughout. We wish to clarify that while “Ancient India” is the accepted usage among Indologists, in other fields, pre-modern South Asia is the common term of reference. Since there is no standardized usage across fields, it is difficult for us to recommend a single standard term for use in the curriculum framework. After careful review, we have settled on a context dependent approach for the use of the terms, “Ancient India,” ‘India,’ ‘Indian subcontinent’ and ‘South Asia,’ as we explain in the edits. The use of terms like “Ancient India” and “India” in the current version of the draft framework, particularly for grades 6 and 7 is at times misleading. Although “Ancient India” is common in the source material, when discussing the Indus Valley Civilization (IVC), we believe it will cause less confusion to students to refer to the “Early Civilization of South Asia or “Ancient South Asia” because much of the Indus Valley is now in modern Pakistan. Conflating “Ancient India” with the modern nation-state of India deprives students from learning about the shared civilizational heritage of India and Pakistan.ⁱⁱ

We note that the argument in favor of the “Indus-Sarasvati” concept tends to invoke hard-to-evaluate arguments from geology—the appendix to our report of November 18th, 2015 is meant only to index trends in the technical literature. The geo-archeological evidence also cannot *by definition*, show signs of migration—it can neither prove nor falsify Aryan migration into pre-modern South Asia. And the genetic evidence on this point is inconclusive at this moment in time. Attempting to privilege or weight genetic and geological findings, as some interest groups do, draws attention away from the strongest line of linguistic argument: first that the material finds of the IVC do not show the horses, horse-drawn chariots and chariot-warfare that the Veda describes abundantly; and second, that no linguist asserts that India is the homeland of the Indo-European languages (i.e. that ancient Persian, Greek, Latin—cousin languages of Sanskrit—originated in the IVC). The appendices represent our attempt to summarize complex specialist material to aid the commission in evaluating the scholarly

consensus around key concepts, we do not feel this technical material belongs in the framework or the textbooks.

Finally, it is not acceptable to delete from the curriculum framework, mention of caste or the phenomenon of untouchability. The Rg Veda itself contains evidence of a hierarchically organized society, with an entire group of people outside its pale. Again, the existence of caste or hierarchical organization does not make pre/modern South Asian society an outlier among human societies. Many of the most important and vibrant forms of Hinduism—the bhakti and Puranic traditions--those with which a majority of Hindus identify-- emerge well after the Vedic period, and could be more profitably explored in the framework. Scholarly disagreement over the date that Hinduism emerges as an organized religion must be leavened by people's right to shape a tradition to their own needs. But this right, inserted into a statewide curriculum framework, must not go so far that it infringes upon the rights of others who are injured or discriminated by aspects of this tradition. The idea that "Sanathana Dharma" defines Hinduism is in fact a relatively recent, and narrow, one. When we consider how Hinduism (indeed, any religion) is practiced today, there are so many strands and such a variety of beliefs and practices that someone belonging to one form of Hinduism may be unaware of other forms of Hindu practice. The input from one particular strand of Hinduism today is important for understanding that unique interpretation of Hinduism, but that is only one view within a very large mosaic of Hindu beliefs and practices. Moreover, the study of a religion, especially in historical terms, is not defined by membership in it.

We are surprised by some of the hostile comments we have received. One member of this committee, and one its consultants have been recognized by the Government of India for the contributions of their scholarship; two of the most eminent Indus Valley archeologists are also committee members. Some of us are members of devout Hindu families, while others on the committee have made the study of the texts or practices of Hinduism a lifelong project. It may be worth underscoring what we see as a positive reflection of our work: members of the committee have been raised in Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Muslim, Christian, and Jewish faiths (while some may follow no faith at all). We take this to be the most genuine testimony of the pluralist sensitivity and objectivity of our recommendations.

Please do not hesitate to call on us if you require further information or clarification of our edits.

ⁱ It may be important to note that Michel Danino, of the International Forum for India's Heritage does not have a Ph.D. He is of course entitled to his opinion, but he has no certified competence to assess matters of social/scientific, historical, or philological interpretation.

ⁱⁱ To some extent this is also an issue for thinking about classical, early modern, medieval, or colonial India, but in these sections of the framework we have by and large left the references to "India" intact, replacing with "South Asia" or Indian subcontinent when disciplinary convention seemed to confuse the point being made.

Yours Sincerely,

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15. Rita P. Wright, Professor of Anthropology, New York University, and member of the NYU Center for Human Origins.

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